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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8769
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0308
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0330
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2015
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0758
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0161
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0812
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0072
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 0123
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0043
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 0057
RUEHBFI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0082
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 0395
RHMFIISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2//
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J5/RUE//
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000520

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/23/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL TX US

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY
INFORMS CHARGE THE "BLACK LIST" IS ABOLISHED

REF: A. (A) 5/22/2007 BRUSH-PERRY TELCON

¶B. (B) ASHGABAT 464

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.
4 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶1. (S) A representative of Turkmenistan's Ministry of National Security (MNB) contacted polmilloff on May 22 to forward to Charge the ministry's decision to abolish the "black list" of citizens prevented from leaving Turkmenistan. During a follow-up conversation on May 23, the MNB contact said this decision was definite and had been made at the "highest levels." Since the December 21 death of President Niyazov, embassy and a series of high-level delegations have warned the new government of President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov that continuation of the list would prompt the USG not to extend the Jackson-Vanik Amendment waiver. The USG has been joined by high-level international organization delegations, including the May 3 visit of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour and the May 22 visit of OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and human rights (ODIHR) Director Strohal, in encouraging the Berdimuhamedov administration to improve freedom of movement. Turkmenistan's ability to turn a positive-sounding initiative into inaction should not be underestimated. Embassy is awaiting further clarification of this news before we respond officially. End Summary.

Tell the Charge She doesn't have to Raise this Anymore

¶2. (S) At approximately 1800 local time on May 22, polmilloff

received a phone call from a representative of the MNB requesting him to tell the Charge that "she doesn't have to raise the list anymore with the government." In response to polmiloff's question about whether the list in question actually was the "black list," the MNB representative said, "yes, that's what you call it." The representative said he would contact polmiloff again on May 23 for further clarification. On May 23 the representative said he did not have any more details other than to assure the Charge that the decision was definite and made at the highest levels.

If True....

¶3. (S) After receiving the May 22 phone call, polmiloff called Charge, who was attending a reception in honor of visiting ODIHR Director Strohal. Charge pulled aside UK Ambassador Butcher and OSCE Human Dimension Officer Benjamin Moreau to tell them she had received word that the list would be abolished, but not to do anything further with the information until she had more details/confirmation. She asked Moreau to inform Strohal of the development before he departed Ashgabat. Butcher's immediate reaction was that Berdimuhamedov now felt strong enough to tackle the difficult issues. According to Butcher, after Berdimuhamedov had satisfied the Russians with the May 10-14 Putin visit (ref B), he had some latitude to be more bold. Charge shared her caution at accepting this news at face value, emphasizing that Turkmenistan appeared to have an endless capacity for turning positive initiatives into inaction. She reminded him of initial USG enthusiasm for the end of the exit visa regime in 2004, only to have it replaced by the even less transparent black list. Of course, if true, the international community shared credit for jointly keeping the pressure on the new administration to improve the lives of Turkmenistan's citizens.

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Comment

¶4. (S) As Charge noted in ref a, this information is far from confirmed. There are a number of legal obstacles, including the 2005 Law on Migration, that would have to be removed/modified in order to truly kill the list. Every year Turkmenistan has done the absolute bare minimum to agree to the letter, but not the spirit, of USG requests for improved freedom of movement. The mounting chorus of voices from USG visitors, joined by world-class human rights officials such as Strohal and Arbour, may have convinced the government to abolish the list. But as with anything in Turkmenistan, the only real proof of change is in deed. End Comment.

BRUSH